

China's First Tongan Language Program Launched in Beijing Foreign Studies University

China's first Tongan language program was launched on the evening of October 19th at the International Building, Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU).

At the launching ceremony, Vice President Yan Guohua of BFSU made a welcoming speech in which he briefly introduced the university, highlighting the point that BFSU was one of the leading universities in China that taught the largest number of languages in the country. Yan emphasized that the university was working hard to increase its present language programs from 84 to 100 in order to cover all the countries that had so far established diplomatic relations with China. He was very glad and excited that Tongan was now included into the curriculum, which showed that China valued its friendship with the Kingdom of Tonga. "Small language, big diplomacy," said Yan as he encouraged the students to cherish the opportunity of learning Tongan.

In response, His Excellency Tau'aika'Uta'atu, the Tongan Ambassador to China, expressed gratitude to the university for its admirable efforts in offering the Tongan language to Chinese students. He pointed out that BFSU was the very first Chinese university and the only university outside Hawaii and the South Pacific region to teach his mother tongue. He was deeply impressed and touched by the passion and commitment that BFSU teachers and students had demonstrated in learning the language and culture of Tonga. He expressed his wish that the program would foster the friendship and communication between the two countries.

Professor Zhang Jian, Dean of the School of English and International Studies (SEIS), spoke on behalf of the School, which has recently been designated by China's Ministry of Education to establish a Tongan language program, to thank the Ambassador for the generous support that the Embassy had provided for building the program. He observed that Tongan was the first non-English language and the first of four South Pacific languages (the other three are Maori, Fijian and Samoan) to be ever taught at SEIS. The School has also planned to, according to Zhang, build up more courses in the Tongan language and culture as well as courses on South Pacific studies. He had great expectations for the success of the Tongan program and hoped it would pave way for the other South Pacific language programs.

Starting from September 2017, Tongan has been taught as a third foreign language to BFSU students, including both undergraduates and postgraduates. In the fall semester, two juniors from SEIS of BFSU, have chosen this course for credit and a few students from other schools and departments have also audited the class out of interest. Ms. Langi Finefeuiaki, a first-year M.A. student studying at a university in Beijing, is now teaching the class and she is very pleased at the fast progress the Chinese students have made. "I feel thrilled at the opportunity of making history and would like to encourage more teachers from Tonga to join the program," Finefeuiaki said.

The ceremony was hosted by Professor Wang Wenli, the course coordinator based at the SEIS.